

**KINGDOM PRAYER & STUDY GUIDE**

**WEEK 1:**

***"AWAKENING OUR SPIRITUAL APPETITES"***

**JANUARY 13-19, 2019**

# **FOLLOWING JESUS:**

**EXPLORING CHRISTIAN**

**"BEST PRACTICES"**

**FOR A MEANINGFUL LIFE**



**WINDSOR VILLAGE**  
*Church Family*



# **FOLLOWING JESUS:**

## **EXPLORING CHRISTIAN “BEST PRACTICES” FOR A MEANINGFUL LIFE**

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JANUARY 13 - 19, 2019*

**Week 1:  
AWAKENING OUR SPIRITUAL APPETITES**

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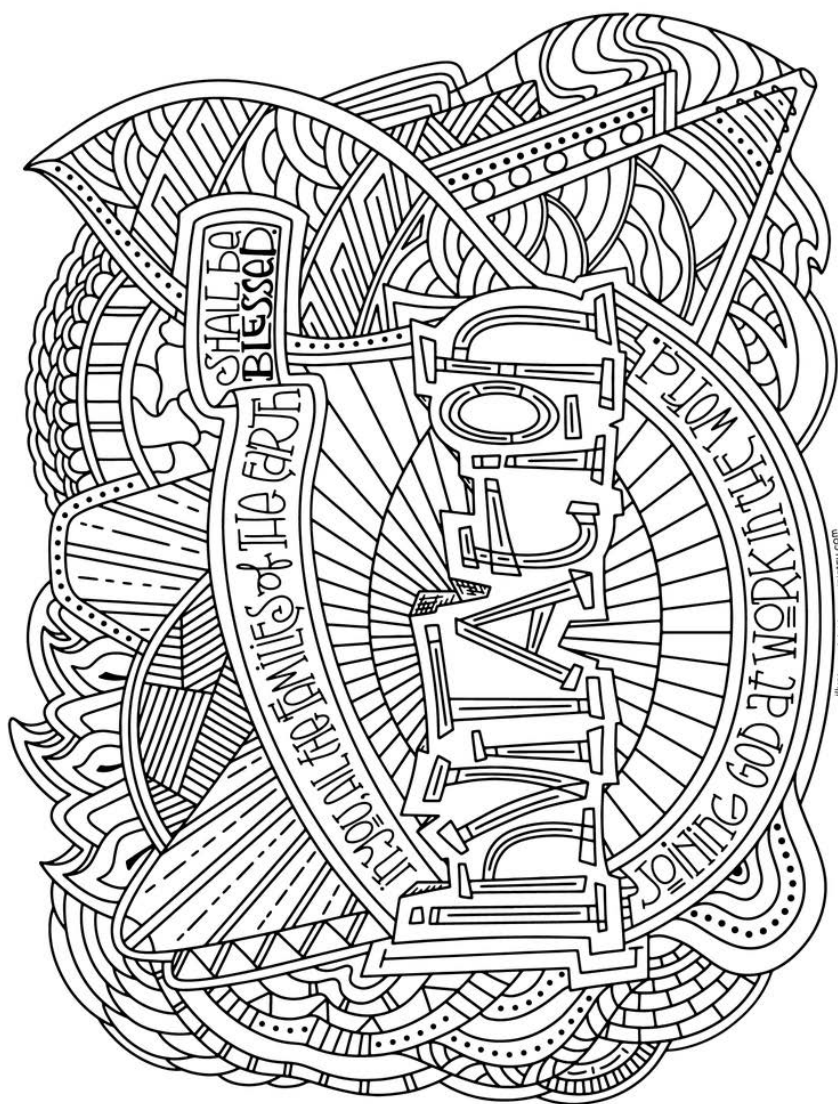


illustration: thecommunity.com

# A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW FORMAT OF OUR PRAYER & STUDY GUIDE

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus encourages us to “*change and become like children*” (Matthew 18:3). Humility, a spirit of joyful adventure, and a willingness to change are necessary postures of the heart for Kingdom growth. In response, therefore, to Jesus’ admonition and to a fresh movement of the Holy Spirit in our midst, we are adventuring into a new “Kingdom Prayer & Study Guide” format that combines the best that our prayer and educational ministries have to offer.

The basic order of each day is as follows:

1. A Breath Prayer
2. Focal Passage(s) of Scripture
3. Kingdom Prayer
4. Concepts to Consider
5. Personal & Kingdom-Centered Reflection  
Questions
6. An Optional Time of Centering and Soaking  
(*when appropriate for the day*)

So, if you're tired of *trying* to live the Christian life, and instead want to *train* to live a life characterized by God's Shalom (wholeness, rest, peace, etc.), then our prayer is that the Lord will use this daily time in His Presence to refresh and strengthen your very being. Over the next few weeks, let's pledge to walk together on a journey that explores the "best practices" of how to live the Christian life for your sake... and for the sake of expanding the healing light of the Kingdom of God into a broken and darkened world.

The equipment you will need for this expedition are:

- This guide
- A Bible
- A pen or pencil
- Approximately 45 minutes of your time
- Map colors/markers (*optional*)
- A Covenant Group of 3 or more Jesus-Followers with whom you regularly meet (once a week is recommended). Register your group here:  
<http://bit.ly/WVCFGroups>
- (*Optional*) Supplemental Book:  
***Soul Feast***, by Marjorie J. Thompson  
<http://bit.ly/SoulFeastbook>
- An open heart and mind to the leading of the Holy Spirit

Are you ready? Let the adventure begin!



# Day 1:

## Celebrating Our Heritage: Exploring Historical Christian Spiritual Practices

### 1. Center Down

Before we begin today's spiritual excursion, please take a few moments to breathe! Take three slow, deep breaths, expanding from your abdomen; try not to raise your shoulders. As you inhale, whisper, *"We have..."* As you exhale, whisper, *"...a Hope and a Heritage."* This way of breathing and speaking is known as a "breath prayer."

### 2. Slowly read aloud the following Scriptures

*(Feel free to pause at any time during your reading to reflect on, thank, praise, or acknowledge God's stirring in your thoughts and emotions.)*

*"Stay clear of silly stories that get dressed up as religion. Exercise daily in God—no spiritual flabbiness, please! Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever."  
(I Timothy 4:7-8, MSG)*

*“So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for Him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what He wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.” (Romans 12:1-2, MSG)*

**For further exploration:**

Video: <http://bit.ly/JDDisciplines>

Reading: <http://bit.ly/MeansOfGrace>

### **3. Kingdom Prayer**

Loving Father, apart from Jesus, the True Vine, we can do nothing. Thank You for Jesus. Thank You for working in us, giving us the desire and the power to do what please You. Thank You for being patient and long-suffering with us as we grow into the image of Christ. Your love is so amazing! We give You thanks, O Lord, with all our hearts. We will sing Your praises. We bow before Your holy Temple as we worship. We praise Your Name for Your unfailing love and faithfulness, for Your promises are backed by all the honor of Your Name. As soon as we pray, You answer

us. You encourage us by giving us strength.

Divine Father, we realize that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit whom You gave to live inside each one of us. We confess that we do not belong to ourselves for You bought us with a high price, so we must honor You with our bodies. As true disciples of Jesus Christ, we will remain faithful to His teachings. We declare that we know the truth, and the truth has set us free. We are strong and immovable. We always work enthusiastically for the Lord for we know that nothing we do for the Lord is ever useless. As we journey in our spiritual walk, we confess that we will mark out a straight path for our feet and we will remain on it. We will not get sidetracked with distractions, but we will keep our feet from following evil. We understand the impact of our influence on others; therefore, we make a decision today to live in such a way that will not cause another believer to stumble and fall. We declare that as the Lord's sheep, we listen to His voice. We know Him, and therefore, we follow Him. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we take authority over our minds, wills, and emotions because we are surrounded by a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith. Therefore, we strip off every weight that slows us down; especially the sin that easily trips us up. And we declare that we run with endurance the race that You have set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the Champion who initiates and perfects our faith.

Holy Spirit, whenever we become unstable remind us that the Father has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.

Holy Spirit, help us to keep our focus and stay committed, always seeking the Kingdom of God above all else and living righteously. Holy Spirit, we ask You to guide our lives so that we won't do what our sinful nature craves. Give us desires that are opposite of what our sinful nature craves so that we can remain faithful to the calling of God on our lives. Show us how to develop an ear to hear You when You speak the Father's will to us and help us to be quick to obey. Whenever we are in danger of backsliding into our old ways, help us to remember that we are salt and light to this world. Holy Spirit, today I will commit to developing greater spiritual discipline.

Precious Father, forgive us of our sins. Forgive us for neglecting and rejecting spiritual discipline in our personal lives. Forgive us for straying away and leaving Your paths to follow our own. Forgive us for being foolish and prideful when we have been confronted with rebuke. Forgive us Father, for failing to hide Your Word in our hearts on a regular basis to safeguard ourselves from sinning against You. Lord, forgive me for *(list any sins that You have committed)*.

Holy Spirit, remind us of those we need to forgive and help us to be quick to forgive. As for me, Holy Spirit, bring to my remembrance those I need to forgive. *(Take a moment and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal names or faces of people that You may need to forgive. As He reveals, say aloud, "I forgive name of person(s)." Now, trust the Lord to heal any wounds in Your soul caused by unforgiveness.)*

Holy Spirit, help us not to yield to temptation but deliver us from the evil one.

Almighty Father, blessed be Your holy Name. You are honored in Judah. Your Name is great in Israel. Jerusalem is where You live and Mount Zion is Your home. Salvation comes from You, the God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and strength belong to You forever and ever! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

*Scripture References for the Prayer Text: John 15:5, Philippians 2:13, Psalm 138:1-3, I Corinthians 6:19-20,, John 8:31-32, I Corinthians 15:58, Proverbs 4:26-27, Romans 14:13, John 10:27, Hebrews 12:1-2, II Timothy 1:7, Matthew 6:33, Galatians 5:16-17, Isaiah 53:6, Psalm 119:11, Matthew 6:13, Psalm 76:1-2, Revelation 7:10, 12*

#### **4. Concepts to Consider**

As we begin this journey together in exploring some of the “best practices” of our Christian faith, I think it’s important to note that as followers of Jesus we are the inheritors of a tremendous heritage of spiritual formation practices that stretch back into our early Jewish roots and develop over the long centuries of Christian experience.

We often think of other religions as having more visible and perhaps more ordered ways of living, *e.g.*, observant Jews usually pray three times a day, Muslims five times a day, and Hindus often

have regular morning rituals; but, some of the earliest Jesus followers, known as the “Desert Fathers and Mothers” developed a robust “seven times a day I will praise You” (*Psalms 119:164*) daily pattern that is still in use today among many Christian monastic and neo-monastic communities around the world. It is safe to say that since our beginning, Christians have followed “regular” or “ordered” ways of “doing daily life.” Our “freedom in Christ” doesn’t mean we have the luxury to simply ignore all that has gone before us without running the risk of losing our roots and the wealth of knowledge and wisdom that precedes us. We, as the renowned physicist Isaac Newton said, “stand on the shoulders of giants.”

Unfortunately, a fair number of people in the US who identify as “Highly Religious,” live relatively spiritually untethered lives, and do not consistently follow any form of regular devotional or worship practices beyond weekend service attendance, occasionally praying or reading the Bible (*approx. 40%, of which only about 17% say they read the Bible daily and pray, see: Pew Research on Religious Typography, <http://bit.ly/Pew2018>*).

The Bible, of course, sets out many practices or “disciplines” for our benefit. Jesus and His disciples followed the basic Jewish patterns of daily prayer, festival celebration, and Sabbath (*Friday sunset to Saturday sunset*) observance. Early Christian worship liturgies (*which often included both Saturday, "Sabbath" observance AND Sunday, "Lord's Day" observance*), and devotional practice naturally grew out of this same Jewish/Torah-following seedbed.

Jumping forward 1,000 years, John and Charles Wesley in England drew several of their methodical (*aka* “methodist”) practices from the teachings of the early Eastern Church. In essence, as Wesleyan Christians today, these methods and means are our theological “native language” so, in an attempt to not lose our *prima lingua*, you are invited to set aside time over the next few weeks to investigate the following “best practices” of our historical faith:

Week 1. **Awakening Our Spiritual Appetites** (Matthew 5:6)

Week 2. **Listening to Scripture** (2 Timothy 2:15)

Week 3. **Listening to the Saints** (Hebrews 12:1)

Week 4. **The Power of Prayer** (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

Week 5. **The Call to Worship** (Hebrews 10:25)

Week 6. **Entering into Sabbath Rest** (Exodus 16:23)

Week 7. **Fasting for Spiritual Awakening** (Matthew 6:16)

Week 8. **Kingdom Examination** (2 Corinthians 13:5)

Week 9. **Walking in Accountability** (Galatians 6:1-5)

Week 10. **The Gift of Hospitality** (Hebrews 13:2)

Week 11. **Ordering Our Days** (Psalm 50:23)

## **5. Reflection Questions**

*(You are encouraged to record your responses to the following inquiries in some tangible, meaningful way, (i.e., write, draw, create, vlog/blog, sing, etc.)*

**a. Personal Reflection:** How does it make you feel to realize (or be reminded) that we as Christians are the inheritors of a spiritual formation heritage that is not generally practiced to its fullest today? How will you begin to “*Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering?*”



**b. Kingdom Reflection:** Since we have a “*great cloud of witnesses*” (*Hebrews 12:1*) that are cheering us on from the “bleachers of eternity,” and have gone before us and laid the groundwork in life and discipline for us, what responsibility do we have, as the Church-on-earth, to take time to investigate and exercise the Christian “best practices” that have been left to us?

**Optional Time of Centering/Soaking:**

*If possible, take some time, perhaps 5 to 15 minutes, to get into a comfortable position and simply allow the Lord to minister to you at a deep level (Psalm 42:7). Turn off or put down all distractions. Close your eyes. Hold in your thoughts a meaningful word, phrase, or image from the Scripture passages you read today. Release all other thoughts and concerns into the Presence of the Lord. If your thoughts wander, that’s okay, just gently return to your Scriptural word, phrase, or image. You may want to set a timer.*



# Day 2:

## Craving God

### 1. Center Down

Before we begin today's spiritual excursion, please take a few moments to breathe! Take three slow, deep breaths, expanding from your abdomen; try not to raise your shoulders. As you inhale, whisper, "***Our very being...***" As you exhale, whisper, "***...longs for You, Lord.***" This way of breathing and speaking is known as a "breath prayer."

### 2. Slowly read aloud the following Scriptures

*(Feel free to pause at any time during your reading to reflect on, thank, praise, or acknowledge God's stirring in your thoughts and emotions.)*

*"As a deer yearns for streams of water, so I yearn for You, O God. My whole being [nefesh] thirsts for God, for the living God." (Psalm 42:1-3, RA)*

*"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." (Matthew 5:6, ESV)*

*“So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.”*  
(1 Peter 2:1-3, ESV)

**For further exploration:**

Videos: <http://bit.ly/TKPS42>  
<http://bit.ly/BPNephesh>

**3. Kingdom Prayer**

Righteous Father, we acknowledge You as *Yahweh Yireh* (“the LORD will provide”) because we trust You to provide for us. We thank You for watering the earth, causing the grain to grow. You produce seed for the farmer and bread for the hungry. Thank You for nourishing our souls with every word that comes from Your mouth. We are so grateful for Your love. How You care for us! You have given us a new song to sing; a hymn of praise to You. Many will see what You have done and be amazed. They will put their trust in You. We take joy in doing Your will, for Your instructions are written on our hearts. We can’t keep the good news of Your justice hidden in our hearts. We must talk about Your faithfulness and saving power to everyone! All who search for You, Lord, will be filled with joy and gladness in You. You are our Helper and our Savior.

Merciful Father, we know that You are our source for all things. We declare that all of our needs (physical, spiritual, and emotional) are supplied from Your glorious riches which have been given to us in Christ Jesus. Therefore, as a Church Family, we confess that we are strengthened through Christ to meet the needs of those who are in need of physical and spiritual nourishment within our community. As a Church Family, we will extend our reach into the global community to reach those in foreign lands who need access to clean water and nutritious food. We confess that Jesus is the Bread of Life and whoever comes to Him will never be hungry, and whoever believes in Him will never be thirsty. Lord, we declare that we will not just rely upon our government to meet the needs of the poor and hungry. We will not withhold good from those who deserve it when it's in our power to help them. We will not put off until later what we can do right now. We commit ourselves to give generously and faithfully. We will guard our hearts to keep them tender and compassionate by meditating on Your Word day and night so that we can better discern how to help others.

*Ask the Holy Spirit to show you a person or person(s) you can help today:*

Holy Spirit, help us not to just think about our own needs, but the needs of others around us. Teach us the importance of sharing what we've received with others who are in need. Strengthen us as we continue looking for better, more effective ways to minister to the needs of those in our community. Remind us of

the Father's faithful love for us and help us to share that love with those who may have lost hope. Give us a heart to pray for the hungry. Show us ways in which we can collaborate with those organizations who are working to meet the needs of the hungry. Sharpen our discernment and make us more sensitive to the unspoken needs of others. Give us a deeper compassion and a clearer understanding of our covenant relationship with You and with one another.

Gracious Father, forgive those of us for being greedy, selfish, and inconsiderate. Forgive those of us for when we've turned a deaf ear to the Holy Spirit when He prompts us to give. Forgive us for being fearful of sharing our financial resources, instead of trusting You. Forgive us for neglecting our spiritual needs and living imbalanced lives. Forgive us for at times wasting food and thoughtlessly misusing our natural resources. Lord, forgive me for *(list any sins that You have committed)*.

Holy Spirit, remind us of all those we need to forgive and help us to be quick to forgive. As for me, Holy Spirit, bring to my remembrance those I need to forgive. *(Take a moment and ask the Holy Spirit to show You names or faces of people that You may need to forgive. As He shows You, say aloud, "I forgive name of person(s)." Now, trust the Lord to heal any wounds in Your soul caused by unforgiveness.)*

Holy Spirit, help us all not to yield to temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Lord, it is You who rides across the ancient heavens. Your mighty voice thunders from the sky. Your majesty shines down on Israel. Your strength is mighty in the heavens. Your glory is awesome in the sanctuary. There is no one like You, for You are great and Your Name is full of power. Who would not fear You, O King of nations? That title belongs to You alone! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

*Scripture References for the Written Text:* Genesis 22:14, Isaiah 55:10, Matthew 4:4, Psalm 40:3, 8, 10, 16-17, Philippians 4:19, John 6:35, Proverbs 3:27-28, Proverbs 4:23, Psalm 1:2, Matthew 6:13, Psalm 68:33-35, Jeremiah 10:6-7

#### **4. Concepts to Consider**

In a world that constantly bombards us with messages that push us toward acquiring and consuming “the next new thing,” “what makes me feel good,” or “what you deserve,” *etc.*, it’s important to understand that, whether we acknowledge it or not, our deepest selves inherently call out to the depth of God’s Presence (Romans 8:16; Psalm 42:7; *tehom el tehom* תְּהוֹם אֶל תְּהוֹם “deep calls to deep”). We were created for personal, intimate connection with our Creator, and **there is no lasting satisfaction outside of God.**

Augustine (Algerian Bishop, 354-430 AD) wrote in Book 1 of his Confessions, “*Great are You, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Your power, and of Your wisdom there is no end. And [humanity], being a part of Your creation, desires to praise You--*

*[humanity], who bears about... [its] mortality, the witness of [its] sin, even the witness that You resist the proud, — yet [humanity], this part of Your creation, desires to praise You. You move us to delight in praising You; for You have made us for Yourself, and **our hearts are restless until they rest in You.** Lord, teach me to know and understand which of these should be first: to call on You, or to praise You; and likewise to know You, or to call on You.” Bishop Augustine rightly observes that human restlessness is not quenched until we “drink from the Well that will never run dry” (John 4:14).*

Over these next few weeks pay attention to the dry and thirsty places in your life; the dissatisfied, “thin” and hungry places in your being. These are the places and spaces where God, in His love and grace, desires to “satisfy your hunger with good things” (Psalm 107:9; Luke 1:53). One way we can access this grace is through Christian spiritual practices. So make every effort to... “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food” (Isaiah 55:1-2, ESV).



## **5. Reflection Questions**

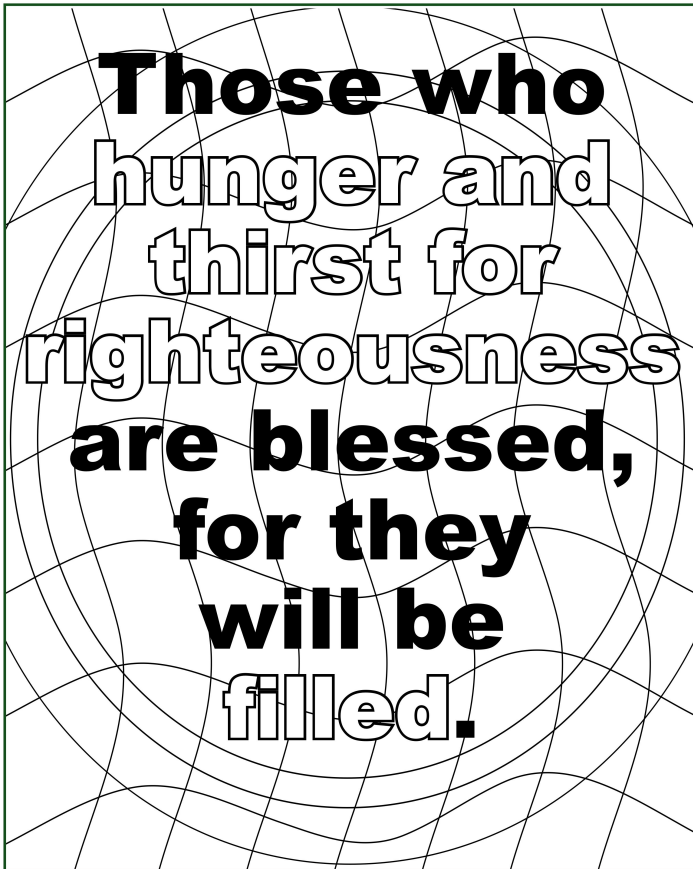
*(You are encouraged to record your responses to the following inquiries in some tangible, meaningful way, i.e., write, draw, create, vlog/blog, sing, etc.)*

**a. Personal Reflection:** What are the thirsty and hungry places in my life?

**b. Kingdom Reflection:** What are the thirsty and hungry places in my church? In my world? What is one thing I can do to help address this hunger?

### **Optional Time of Centering/Soaking:**

*If possible, take some time, perhaps 5 to 15 minutes, to get into a comfortable position and simply allow the Lord to minister to you at a deep level (Psalm 42:7). Turn off or put down all distractions. Close your eyes. Hold in your thoughts a meaningful word, phrase, or image from the Scripture passages you read today. Release all other thoughts and concerns into the Presence of the Lord. If your thoughts wander, that's okay, just gently return to your Scriptural word, phrase, or image. You may want to set a timer.*



# Day 3:

## Acknowledging our Discontentment

### 1. Center Down

Before we begin today's spiritual excursion, please take a few moments to breathe! Take three slow, deep breaths, expanding from your abdomen; try not to raise your shoulders. As you inhale, whisper, "*We are created...*" As you exhale whisper, "*...for Shalom.*"

### 2. Slowly read aloud the following Scriptures

*(Feel free to pause at any time during your reading to reflect on, thank, praise, or acknowledge God's stirring in your thoughts and emotions.)*

*[Jude, the half-brother of Jesus wrote,] Dear friends, I've dropped everything to write you about this life of salvation that we have in common. I have to write insisting—begging!—that you fight with everything you have in you for this faith entrusted to us as a gift to guard and cherish. What has happened is that some people have infiltrated our ranks (our Scriptures warned us this would happen), who beneath their pious skin are shameless scoundrels. Their design is to replace the sheer grace of our God with sheer license—which means doing away with Jesus Christ, our one and only Master.*

...

*These people are warts on your love feasts as you worship and eat together. They're giving you a black eye—carousing shamelessly, grabbing anything that isn't nailed down. They're puffs of smoke pushed by gusts of wind; late autumn trees stripped clean of leaf and fruit, doubly dead, pulled up by the roots; wild ocean waves leaving nothing on the beach but the foam of their shame; lost stars in outer space on their way to the black hole.*

*Enoch, the seventh after Adam, prophesied of them: "Look! The Master comes with thousands of holy angels to bring judgment against them all, convicting each person of every defiling act of shameless sacrilege, of every dirty word they have spewed of their pious filth." These are the "grumpers," the bellyachers, grabbing for the biggest piece of the pie, talking big, saying anything they think will get them ahead.*

*But remember, dear friends, that the apostles of our Master, Jesus Christ, told us this would happen: "In the last days there will be people who don't take these things seriously anymore. They'll treat them like a joke, and make a religion of their own whims and lusts." These are the ones who split churches, thinking only of themselves. There's nothing to them, no sign of the Spirit!*

*But you, dear friends, carefully build yourselves up in this most holy faith by praying in the Holy Spirit, staying right at the center of God's love, keeping your arms open and outstretched, ready for the mercy of our Master, Jesus Christ. This is the unending life, the real life! Go easy on those who hesitate in the faith. Go after those who take the wrong way.*

*Be tender with sinners, but not soft on sin. The sin itself stinks to high heaven.*

*And now to Him who can keep you on your feet, standing tall in His bright Presence, fresh and celebrating—to our one God, our only Savior, through Jesus Christ, our Master, be glory, majesty, strength, and rule before all time, and now, and to the end of all time. Yes [Amen].*  
(The Book of Jude, MSG)

**For further exploration:**

Video: <http://bit.ly/JudeExplainer>

**3. Kingdom Prayer**

Loving Father, You are the force that holds us all together. Thank You for being compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. Thank You for Jesus who prayed that we would all be one, even as He is one with You. Thank You for gifting the Body of Christ with apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to equip us to do the work of the Lord and build us up until we come to unity in our faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Father God, You are our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. We praise Your Name! We stand still before You, knowing that You are God. You will be honored by every nation throughout the world. May the nations of this world recognize You, Lord. We give You the glory You deserve!

Omnipotent Father, this day we commit, as a Church Family, to search for You and for Your strength continually. We declare that we will not be afraid, for You are with us. We will not be discouraged, for You are our God. You will strengthen and help us. You will hold us up with Your victorious right hand. We know that for the life of God to thrive among us, there must be harmony and unity between us. We refuse to bring sorrow to the Holy Spirit by living and operating in a way that is outside of Your will. We assert ourselves as a body of believers to rid our Church family of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. We will demonstrate that we have passed from death to life by loving our Christian brothers and sisters. We confess that we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit and we all share that same Spirit. Therefore, we decree and declare that we will not be selfish or try to impress others. But we will be humble, thinking of others as better than ourselves. We will not look out only for our own interests, but we will take an interest in others too. We decree that we will build each other up in our most holy faith. We will pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, and we will await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring us eternal life. In this way, we will keep ourselves safe in God's love.

*Holy Spirit, show me how I can defeat strife and division within our Church Family today:*

Holy Spirit, remind us as a Church Family that we are to be holy just as God, our Father, who chose us is holy. He has commanded this of us. Give us the strength to think clearly and to exercise self-control. Keep us mindful that the Father will judge or reward us according to what we do. Help us to release past and present offenses and to be willing to forgive one another just as God has forgiven us. Teach us how to dwell together in unity. Walk us through the steps of rebuilding loving fellowship between us. Help us to obey Your command to “love your neighbor as yourself” so that we will not self-destruct by always biting and devouring one another. Give us a willing heart to allow You to guide our lives so that we won’t do what our sinful nature craves. Show our leaders how to mend their broken relationships and restore balance to our Church Family.

Merciful Father, forgive our many sins. We have sinned against You and against one another. Forgive us for holding onto grudges and for seeking vengeance upon our brothers and sisters in the Lord. Forgive us for leaning toward our own understanding and failing to acknowledge You in all our ways. Forgive those amongst us who are being false witnesses, pouring out lies and sowing discord in our Church family. Forgive those of us who have stood by passively allowing sin and deception to go unaddressed. Forgive us for not heeding the warnings of the Holy Spirit and being hesitant to obey Your commands. Lord, forgive me for *(list any sins that You have committed)*.

Holy Spirit, remind our Church Family of those they need to forgive and help them to be quick to forgive. As for me, Holy Spirit, bring to my remembrance those I need to forgive. *(Take a moment and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal names or faces of people that You may need to forgive. As He reveals, say aloud, "I forgive name of person(s)." Now, trust the Lord to heal any wounds in Your soul caused by unforgiveness.)*

Holy Spirit, help us as a Church Family not to yield to temptation; but deliver us from the evil one.

Magnificent King, You reign forever; executing judgment from Your throne. You will judge the world with justice and rule the nations with fairness. We listen carefully to the thunder of Your voice as it rolls from Your mouth. It rolls across the heavens and Your lightning flashes in every direction. We are in awe of the tremendous voice of Your majesty. You do not restrain it when You speak. Your voice is glorious in the thunder. We can't even imagine the greatness of Your power. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

*Scripture References for the Written Text:* Psalm 103:8, John 17:21, Ephesians 4:11-13, Psalm 46:1, 10, I Chronicles 16:28-29, Psalm 105:4, Isaiah 41:10, Ephesians 4:30-31, I John 3:14, Philippians 2:3-4, Jude 1:20-21, I Peter 1:13, 15, 17, Galatians 5:14-16, Proverbs 3:5-6, Proverbs 6:19, Matthew 6:13, Psalm 9:7-8, Job 37:2-5



#### **4. Concepts to Consider**

In our Scripture reading today, Jude was writing to a church that had suffered an invasion of “cheap grace” teachers; those who believed that God’s grace would excuse any behavior. Of course, this is not true. Our “*sin will find us out*” (*Numbers 32:23*) and the consequences will bear themselves out, either now or in the Day of Judgement. Jude paints a scene of chaos and discontentment in a church that is ultimately encouraged to find its answers in allowing God to operate as the Righteous Judge, and by strongly encouraging the believers to stay faithful to the basics of the Faith. We contend best for the Faith when we build ourselves up in it.

And how do we do this? Jude tells us that our best weapons against false teaching and personal disillusionment within a less-than-perfect church are **Holy Spirit-infused prayer and loving obedience**. These statements highlight the idea that the earliest church was engaged in spiritual practices and disciplines that kept the faithful “on the strait and narrow,” both individually and corporately.

We often experience discontentment when our expectations are not met. The secret to overcoming discontentment is to allow the Lord to change and/or fulfill our expectations. Our lives are not meant to be characterized by frustration, anger, and discontentment. As much as our broken selves fight it, the reality is that we are called to release our grip on false sources of perceived security and control, and allow the Lord Jesus Christ to rule and reign in every

area of life.

“Releasing” is a process that requires holy and gracious practice. Breaking negative habits of thought and action require *persistence* in choosing to surrender to truth and reality, rather than to the lies and justifications we all tell ourselves. The Apostle Paul put it this way, *“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified”* (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, ESV).

For instance, if we are unhappy with our appearance, we have a couple of things to consider: 1. Every day, we have the choice to make room for the Lord to replace our warped perception of self (*we all have it; no one sees themselves with perfect clarity*) with the truth of His loving and holistic perception of us. This “making room” can be accomplished by actually *doing* the Christian “best practices” we will be exploring over the next few weeks. 2. Then, take the steps necessary to reasonably work on our appearance without going into debt or doing medical harm, while accepting our limitations. This may mean simply starting with improving one, small thing that serves as the key to opening the door to godly self-acceptance and confidence. (*“I am fearfully and wonderfully made!” Psalm 139:14*)

## **5. Reflection Questions:**

*(You are encouraged to record your responses to the following inquiries in some tangible, meaningful way, i.e., write, draw, create, vlog/blog, sing, etc.)*

**a. Personal Reflection:** What are my perceived areas of discontentment?

**b. Kingdom Reflection:** What areas of discontentment do I observe in my church? In the larger world?

*Take a few moments to offer up these areas of discontent to the Lord in prayer.*

### **Optional Time of Centering/Soaking:**

*If possible, take some time, perhaps 5 to 15 minutes, to get into a comfortable position and simply allow the Lord to minister to you at a deep level (Psalm 42:7). Turn off or put down all distractions. Close your eyes. Hold in your thoughts a meaningful word, phrase, or image from the Scripture passages you read today. Release all other thoughts and concerns into the Presence of the Lord. If your thoughts wander, that's okay, just gently return to your Scriptural word, phrase, or image. You may want to set a timer.*



# Day 4:

## Battling Spiritual Fatigue

### 1. Center Down

Before we begin today's spiritual excursion, please take a few moments to breathe! Take three slow, deep breaths, expanding from your abdomen; try not to raise your shoulders. As you inhale, whisper, ***“In our weakness...”*** As you exhale, whisper, ***“...God is our strength.”***

### 2. Slowly read aloud the following Scriptures

*(Feel free to pause at any time during your reading to reflect on, thank, praise, or acknowledge God's stirring in your thoughts and emotions.)*

*“Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God?’ Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings*

*like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:27-31, ESV)*

*“For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (Galatians 6:8-10, ESV)*

### **For further exploration:**

Article: <http://bit.ly/CompassionFatigue1>

Study: <http://bit.ly/StressUSA>

Video: <http://bit.ly/ButNotHeld>

### **3. Kingdom Prayer**

Abba Father, we are grateful that when we, the righteous, cry out, You hear and deliver us out of our troubles. Thank You for giving us Your peace and joy. Thank You for providing a life of hope, abundance, and destiny. Thank You for being our strong tower. You are great and most worthy of praise. You are to be feared above all gods. The earth is Yours and everything in it. You laid the earth's foundation on the seas and built it on the ocean depths. Rise up O Lord, in all Your power. With music and singing we celebrate Your mighty acts. You have performed many wonders for us; Your plans for us are too numerous to list.

Comforting Father, You promised to give rest to all who are weary and carry heavy burdens. Your yoke is easy and the burdens You give are light. We are supposed to trust in You with all of our hearts and not depend on our own understanding so that You can direct our paths. You are the God who brings rest to our souls. Today, we declare that we trust in Your Word and believe that it is operative in the hearts and souls of our members who feel defeated, weary or sad. We confess that though they are surrounded by troubles, You, our Father, preserve them, and save them with Your power. Father, we expect You to give them peace of mind and we declare that their hearts will no longer be afraid. Although they may be pressed on every side by troubles, they will not be crushed or broken. They may feel perplexed, but they will not give up and quit. They may be pursued, but they will not be abandoned. They may be knocked down, but, they will get up again and keep going. Father, we declare that they will sleep without fear and enjoy pleasant dreams. There remains a rest for the people of God and we declare that those who feel defeated, weary or sad will obtain and dwell in this rest.

Holy Spirit, we ask You to replace sadness with joy, defeat with victory, and weariness with praise. Help those who feel defeated, weary or sad to focus on Your blessings in their lives rather than on their circumstances. Remind them to praise the Father at all times so they may obtain life and hope. We ask that You bring all things to their remembrance that concern You and Your plans for their lives. Holy Spirit, please increase their hope as they meditate on

God's Word. Help them not to be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of their minds. Strengthen and renew them in their innermost being. Destroy the fiery darts of the enemy that attempt to permeate their souls. May they always hear Your voice and obey Your will. Show them strategies for victory over every circumstance that is trying to weigh them down.

*Holy Spirit, show me how to pray for those around me who are overburdened, weary or sad:*

Loving Father, forgive them, for any sinful behavior. Forgive them for worry and fear. Forgive them for being anxious. Forgive them for not giving You their cares. Forgive them for not trusting You at all times. Lord, forgive me for *(list any sins that you have committed)*.

Holy Spirit, remind those who are defeated, fatigued or sad of those they need to forgive and help them to forgive. As for me, Holy Spirit, bring to my remembrance those I need to forgive. *(Take a moment and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal names or faces of people that you may need to forgive. As He reveals them, say, "I forgive name of person(s)." Now, trust the Lord to heal any wounds in your soul caused by unforgiveness.)*



Holy Spirit, help those who are defeated, fatigued or sad not to yield to temptation but deliver them from the evil one.

Holy, Holy, Holy are You, the Lord of hosts the whole earth is full of Your glory. You are the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. You are the God who is, who was, and who is to come. You are the Almighty. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

**Scripture References for the Written Text:** Psalm 34:17, Psalm 96:4, Psalm 24:1-2, Psalm 21:13, Psalm 40:5, Matthew 11:28-30, Proverbs 3:5, Psalm 138:7, John 14:27, II Corinthians 4:8-9, Proverbs 3:24, Hebrews 4:9, Psalm 34:1, Romans 12:2, Matthew 6:13, Isaiah 6:3, Revelation 1:8.

#### **4. Concepts to Consider**

We live in a time where the constant bombardment of information can cause “information overload,” “crisis fatigue,” and “compassion fatigue.” In the church, we can from time to time become weary with social need, ministering, giving, serving, battling the forces of evil, *etc.* But thanks be to God, He has not left us to fend for ourselves. Let’s remember that “*we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Hebrews 4:14-16, ESV).

The example of Jesus taking time to recharge His personal batteries before and after ministering, serves as a tremendous example to us to intentionally take time to evaluate our personal fatigue level. (See: *Matthew 11:28-30; Matthew 14:22-23; Mark 1:35; Mark 4:35-40; Mark 6:31-32*) Just because we walk with the Holy Spirit doesn't mean we are "super-human."

Being a Jesus-follower means that we follow His example. Jesus knew when it was "*time to come away and rest awhile,*" (*Mark 6:31*) and He knew when it was time to get to work (*Matthew 9:37-38*). In order to be effective Jesus-followers and demonstrators of the "good news" of Jesus it is, therefore, important for us to regularly evaluate where we are along the spectrum of rest and work. (In week 8 of our study together, we will explore in more detail the discipline of "examen" and how to take a daily account of ourselves from a spiritual trajectory.)

Today, however, we are called to simply stop. Pause and take a general account of ourselves and be honest with our ongoing need for God's renewing work in our lives. (Some suggested basic stress evaluation tools: <http://bit.ly/StressQuizSAMHSA>; Compassion Fatigue quiz: <http://bit.ly/CFQuery> )

## **5. Reflection Questions**

*(You are encouraged to record your responses to the following inquiries in some tangible, meaningful way, i.e., write, draw, create, vlog/blog, sing, etc.)*

**a. Personal Reflection:** What areas of my life do I sense I am experiencing one or more of the following: information overload, crisis fatigue, compassion fatigue, or general stress due to finances, health, relationships, etc.? Take a few moments to write down (or express in some meaningful, tangible way) the area(s) where you are feeling fatigued.

**b. Kingdom Reflection:** Where do you observe that the world around you is experiencing overload, fatigue, and stress? Write down (or tangibly express) these observed areas of fatigue.

### **Optional Time of Centering/Soaking:**

*If possible, take some time, perhaps 5 to 15 minutes, to get into a comfortable position and simply allow the Lord to minister to you at a deep level (Psalm 42:7). Turn off or put down all distractions. Close your eyes. Hold in your thoughts a meaningful word, phrase, or image from the Scripture passages you read today. Release all other thoughts and concerns into the Presence of the Lord. If your thoughts wander, that's okay, just gently return to your Scriptural word, phrase, or image. You may want to set a timer.*



# Day 5:

## Religious Addiction vs. Restorative Relationship

### 1. Center Down

Before you begin today's spiritual excursion, please take a few moments to breathe! Take three slow, deep breaths, expanding from your abdomen; try not to raise your shoulders. As you inhale, whisper, "***We seek...***" As you exhale whisper, "***...to know the Lord.***"

### 2. Slowly read aloud the following Scriptures

*(Feel free to pause at any time during your reading to reflect on, thank, praise, or acknowledge God's stirring in your thoughts and emotions.)*

*[And Jesus said,] "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your Name, and cast out demons in Your Name, and do many mighty works in Your Name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness.'*

*"Everyone then who hears these words of Mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been*

*founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.” (Matthew 7:21-27, ESV)*

*[The Apostle Paul writes to young Pastor Timothy,] “You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that!” (2 Timothy 3:1-5, NLT)*

### **For further exploration:**

Article: <http://bit.ly/ReligiousAddictionArticle>

Book: <http://bit.ly/LinnAbuse>

Video: <http://bit.ly/BuildingAddict>

Video: <http://bit.ly/ControlAddictChurch>

### **3. Kingdom Prayer**

Heavenly Father, thank You for Jesus, the Name that is above all names. Thank You for giving us the power of the Holy Spirit which is greater than any power that exists in this world. Thank You for never giving up on us, even when we fail time after time. You are so merciful and kind. We cannot live without You, Lord. We will praise You with our whole hearts. We will tell of the marvelous things You have done. We are filled with joy because of You, Most High, and we sing praises to Your Name! We know You to be a shelter for us when we are oppressed and troubled. You never abandon those who search for You. Lord, we love You. You are our strength. You are the Rock in whom we find protection and safety. Your Name is worthy of praise!

Faithful Father, it is not Your will for us to be lost and held captive by addictions to drugs, alcohol, sex, food, gambling, or any other vices. We decree that whoever the Son has set free is truly free. Therefore, we rebuke the spirit of addiction that seeks to destroy the lives of those within our Church Family, our personal families, and in our community. There is no other name that is powerful enough to save our loved ones who are bound by addiction than the Name of Jesus. We are the righteous, and our earnest prayers have great power, producing wonderful results. We will not waver and doubt when things seem to get worse instead of better. We know that You will respond to our faith. Therefore, we declare that we will not cease to pray until our loved ones who are bound by addiction are released and delivered. We declare, in

the Name of Jesus, that our homes, our families, and our communities are restored back to You!

*List the names of friends, family, or neighbors who are struggling to break free of an addiction. Commit to pray specifically for them today:*

Holy Spirit, make us keenly aware of those within our Church Family and community who are hurting and bound. Give us a heart of compassion toward them. Show us how to reach out to them without judging or condemning them. Remind us of Your love and grace that brought us through our trials. Heal those who are bound by addiction in every area of their hurt. Strengthen and help those who have been hurt by the fallout of addiction - the grandparents raising grandchildren, incarcerated parents, abandoned and abused children, impoverished families, and those who have lost loved ones due to addiction. Help us, as a Church Family, to build better partnerships with community organizations who are reaching out to house, educate, and rehabilitate those who want to come out of addiction. May we be salt and light to them as the Lord has commanded.

Righteous Father, please forgive us for not being there when we should have for those who turned to drugs for comfort. Forgive us for judging and condemning those who are addicted. Forgive us for overlooking opportunities to show love and compassion to the



hurting families who are suffering from the effects of addiction. Forgive those who are addicted for turning to something unholy for help instead of turning to You. Forgive them for not responding to the voice of wisdom and making unhealthy choices in life. Forgive those of us who have at one time, knowingly or unknowingly, contributed to the cause of another's addiction. Lord, forgive me for *(list any sins that You have committed)*.

Holy Spirit, remind those who are addicted of all those they need to forgive and help them to be quick to forgive. As for me, Holy Spirit, bring to my remembrance those I need to forgive. *(Take a moment and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal names or faces of people that You may need to forgive. As He reveals them, say, "I forgive name of person(s)." Now, trust the Lord to heal any wounds in Your soul caused by unforgiveness.)*

Holy Spirit, help those who are addicted not to yield to temptation but deliver them from the evil one.

Glorious Lord, ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything You made, we can clearly see Your invincible qualities - Your eternal power and Your divine nature. O Sovereign Lord, You have only begun to show Your greatness and the strength of Your hand to Your servants. Is there any god in heaven or on earth who can perform such great and mighty deeds as You do? In Jesus' Name, Amen.

*Scripture References for the Written Text:* *Philippians 2:9, I John 4:4, Psalm 9:1-2, 9-10, Psalm 18:1-3, John 8:36, James 5:16, Matthew 5:13-14, Matthew 6:13, Romans 1:20, Deuteronomy 3:24*

#### **4. Concepts to Consider**

Religious addiction can generally be defined as a preoccupation with “spirituality” or “supernatural phenomena” that may drive an individual to abandon personal responsibilities, suspend critical thinking, embrace rigidity and legalism, and/or cloud self-awareness, and prevents a person from truly experiencing a vital, loving relationship with God.

As faithful followers of Jesus, we must remain ever watchful to resist the temptation to use any “form of religion” as a subtle substitute for actual relationship with the Living God. In its most extreme form, religious addiction can lead to destructive and irrational behaviors, such as persons believing they are “doing God’s will” by committing horrific acts, such as murder or gross negligence. In its more typical form, religious addiction can “appear as an angel of light,” and become a tool of the evil one to lure sincere persons away from the holistic (shalom-based), daily, process-oriented, “ordinariness” of growing in relationship with God through Jesus Christ, empowered by His Spirit.

When one abandons the step-by-step journey into a life with God for *primarily* chasing after the next religious fad (“every wind of doctrine,” *Ephesians 4:14*), or next “mountain-top experience,” then one is in danger of tipping toward religious addition.

Religious addicts often believe they are “experiencing God” when they are actually addicted to the “high” of the experience rather than being in a grounded relationship with God Himself, that truly transforms their daily decision-making and thought processes. This type of spiritual disconnect is why we too often see persons who claim to follow Christ praising God with gusto in church on Sunday, and then behave as an amoral person during the week.

As the Apostle Paul said, *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers [and sisters], by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect [whole]”* (Romans 12:1-2).

Religious addiction can also present itself as legalism, wherein persons slavishly--and often judgmentally--“follow the rules” to the exclusion of compassionately seeing others (and themselves) as God sees them: as human persons made in His image. The Apostle Paul warns us against this type of life, as he himself was set free from legalism and spiritual status-seeking (*see: Philippians 3; and the Book of Galatians*).

To sum up, as humans, we are given to addictions of various kinds, and one of the most insidious is religious addiction, that mars the actual beautiful life of freedom and hope we are meant to experience in restored relationship with our Loving Father who loves us so very much!

## **5. Reflection Questions**

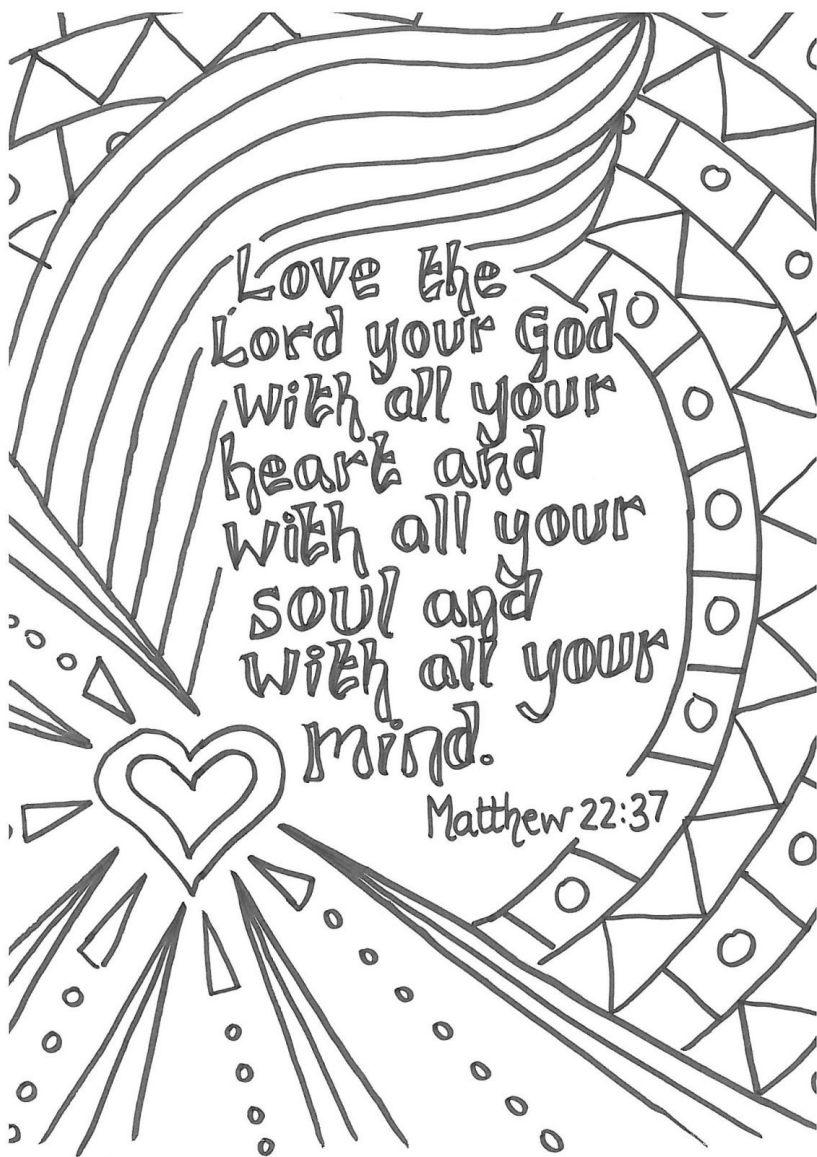
*(You are encouraged to record your responses to the following inquiries in some tangible, meaningful way, i.e., write, draw, create, vlog/blog, sing, etc.)*

**a. Personal Reflection:** If I'm honest, are there areas in my life that I tend to substitute the "trappings of religion" for deep and genuine relationship with God? If so, list them and offer them up to God in prayer.

**b. Kingdom Reflection:** Where do I see “religion” replacing a keen awareness of God Himself in the world around me? Take these contradictions to God in prayer.

*Optional Time of Centering/Soaking:*

*If possible, take some time, perhaps 5 to 15 minutes, to get into a comfortable position and simply allow the Lord to minister to you at a deep level (Psalm 42:7). Turn off or put down all distractions. Close your eyes. Hold in your thoughts a meaningful word, phrase, or image from the Scripture passages you read today. Release all other thoughts and concerns into the Presence of the Lord. If your thoughts wander, that’s okay, just gently return to your Scriptural word, phrase, or image. You may want to set a timer.*



# Day 6:

## The Gift of Grief

### 1. Center Down

Before we begin today's spiritual excursion, please take a few moments to breathe! Take three slow, deep breaths, expanding from your abdomen; try not to raise your shoulders. As you inhale, whisper, "*The Lord is...*" As you exhale whisper, "*...the restorer of our souls.*"

### 2. Slowly read aloud the following Scriptures

*(Feel free to pause at any time during your reading to reflect on, thank, praise, or acknowledge God's stirring in your thoughts and emotions.)*

**Mary:** *Lord, if only You had been here, my brother would still be alive.*

*When Jesus saw Mary's profound grief and the moaning and weeping of her companions, He was deeply moved by their pain in His spirit and was intensely troubled.*

**Jesus:** *Where have you laid his body?*

**Mourning Friends:** *Come and see, Lord.*

***As they walked, Jesus wept;** and everyone noticed how much Jesus must have loved Lazarus. But others were skeptical.*

***Others:** If this man can give sight to the blind, He could have kept him from dying.*

*They are asking, “if Jesus loves Lazarus so much, why didn’t He get here much sooner?” Then Jesus, who was intensely troubled by all of this, approached the tomb—a small cave covered by a massive stone.*

***Jesus:** Remove the stone.*

***Martha:** Lord, he has been dead four days; the stench will be unbearable.*

***Jesus:** Remember, I told you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God.*

*They removed the stone, and Jesus lifted His eyes toward heaven.*

***Jesus:** Father, I am grateful that You have heard Me. I know that You are always listening, but I proclaim it loudly so that everyone here will believe You have sent Me.*

*After these words, He called out in a thunderous voice.*

***Jesus:** Lazarus, come out!*

*Then, the man who was dead walked out of his tomb bound from head to toe in a burial shroud.*



*Jesus: Untie him, and let him go.*

*(John 11:32-44, THE VOICE)*

*[The Apostle Paul writes,] “And regarding the question, friends, that has come up about what happens to those already dead and buried, we don’t want you in the dark any longer. First off, **you must not carry on over them like people who have nothing to look forward to, as if the grave were the last word.** Since Jesus died and broke loose from the grave, God will most certainly bring back to life those who died in Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, MSG)*

*And when [Jesus] drew near and saw the city [of Jerusalem], **He wept over it,** saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.”  
(Luke 19:41-42, ESV)*

**For further exploration:**

Video: <http://bit.ly/GiftGrief>

Books: *Good Grief*, by Rev. Granger E. Westberg

*A Grief Observed*, by C.S. Lewis

### **3. Kingdom Prayer**

Gracious Father, thank You for Your precious Son, Jesus. We are grateful for a Savior who understands our weaknesses, for He faced all of the same testings as we do. We are comforted just by knowing that He cares about the sorrows of those who grieve over the loss of people they loved. Thank You for the Comforter - the Holy Spirit, who lives inside of us. We are grateful for Your sustaining love that holds us near and gives us the courage to stand when our emotions seem overwhelming. Truly, we have seen You in the sanctuary and we have gazed upon Your power and glory. Your unfailing love is better than life itself. How we praise You! We will praise You as long as we live, lifting up our hands to You in prayer.

Precious Father, Your strong arm keeps us intact when we feel as if we can't go on. We declare that those who are going through the process of grief are over-comers right now! They can be assured that even though their weeping may last through the night, joy comes in the morning. They will be strengthened by the Holy Spirit to retain the best memories of their departed loved ones in their heart. We confess that they take comfort in the sincere support and prayers of their brothers and sisters in Christ. They are not bitter, fearful, or anxious for anything. We proclaim that any financial challenge that may have been incurred because of their loved one's death is now covered, for You are their *Yahweh-Yireh*. We decree that they are strong in You and in Your mighty power. We declare that they are able to go forward because they are armed with the knowledge that Your plans for them are for good

and not for disaster, to give them a future and a hope.

*List the names of people you personally know who are overcoming the death of a loved one and include them in this prayer:*

Holy Spirit, remind us all that we are connected to one another. Help us to be more compassionate and thoughtful toward those who are overcoming the death of a loved one. Teach us to discern when it is appropriate to speak and when it's best to offer the ministry of presence. Show us what it truly means to obey the law of Christ by bearing each other's burdens. Give clarity and wisdom to those within bereaved families who are responsible for the funeral and burial plans of their deceased loved ones. Lead them through the whole process without incident. Draw families closer during this time and make them more spiritually sensitive, patient, and prayerful with one another. Even though this is a tough time, give them the assurance to know that the Father will soon give them a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing for mourning, and festive praise instead of despair.

Heavenly Father, forgive us for our sins of apathy, indifference, and insensitivity toward the bereaved. Forgive families who are fighting with one another and stirring confusion during a time when they should be coming together in unity. Forgive those who are

being greedy and selfish over the appropriations of a loved one's will and possessions. Forgive those who are still holding grudges and unforgiveness toward the deceased. Lord, forgive me for *(list any sins that You have committed)*.

Holy Spirit, remind the bereaved of those they need to forgive and help them to be quick to forgive. As for me, Holy Spirit, bring to my remembrance those I need to forgive. *(Take a moment and ask the Holy Spirit to show You names or faces of people that You may need to forgive. As He shows You, say aloud, "I forgive name of person(s)." Now, trust the Lord to heal any wounds in Your soul caused by unforgiveness.)*

Holy Spirit, help the bereaved not to yield to temptation; but deliver them from the evil one.

Great and Mighty God, You are the Lord, our Redeemer; the Holy One of Israel. Oh, that You would burst from the heavens and come down! How the mountains would quake in Your presence! For since the world began, no ear has heard, and no eye has seen a God like You who works for those who wait on Him. In Jesus' Name, amen.

***Scripture References for the Written Text:*** Hebrews 4:15, Psalm 63:2-4, Psalm 30:5, Ephesians 6:10, Jeremiah 29:11, Galatians 6:2, Isaiah 61:3, Matthew 6:13, Isaiah 41:14, Isaiah 64:1, 4

#### **4. Concepts to Consider**

God has endowed humanity with a means of processing loss so that we do not become stuck in debilitating sadness. (Note: loss can come to us in many forms, e.g., unfulfilled expectations, divorce, loss of a job, various life changes, loss of control, death, etc.) This process is known as “grief.” When we don’t embrace the gift of grief and choose to avoid it or push it aside, we are likely to respond to the pain of loss in unhealthy ways. Our unprocessed hurt may come out “sideways” as misplaced anger, depression, addiction, numbness, etc.

It is interesting to observe that Jesus--even though He knew He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead--nevertheless paused to loudly wail and weep and allow Himself to feel the pain of the physical absence of His friend. He also stopped to affirm the loss experienced and expressed by Mary, Martha, and all the assembled mourners. At no point does Jesus criticize the fact that they are mourning. He simply states--and finally demonstrates--that He is the source of truth and hope. He is the resurrection and life. The ultimate destiny of all who die in the Lord is a resurrected reality in the New Heaven and Earth.

As we work through several “best practices” of the Christian faith over the coming weeks, one of our goals is to begin to exercise holy command over our unwieldy thoughts and emotions. Through consistent training, we will begin to see God’s victory in our lives become a more normal part of our daily experience. We will slowly begin to realize that we are moving

forward and that we are no longer imprisoned by things that previously bound us. Remember, Jesus came to give us life, and life more abundant, and He came to set us “*free indeed*” (*John 8:36*) and that freedom can only be arrived at--ultimately--through a practised and disciplined approach to our Life in Christ.

## **5. Reflection Questions**

**a. Personal Reflection:** Do you have any areas of unprocessed loss and pain? If so, please list these areas here:

**b. Kingdom Reflection:** As you look around your family and your world, what are the areas of sadness and pain that need to go through the grief process and be submitted to God and His loving grace?

*Take time to offer these areas of loss and pain to the Lord in prayer.*

**Optional Time of Centering/Soaking:**

*If possible, take some time, perhaps 5 to 15 minutes, to get into a comfortable position and simply allow the Lord to minister to you at a deep level (Psalm 42:7). Turn off or put down all distractions. Close your eyes. Hold in your thoughts a meaningful word, phrase, or image from the Scripture passages you read today. Release all other thoughts and concerns into the Presence of the Lord. If your thoughts wander, that's okay, just gently return to your Scriptural word, phrase, or image. You may want to set a timer.*



Praise  
the Lord,  
*who*  
*heals the*  
brokenhearted.

Psalm 147  
5th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B  
[looktohimandberadiant.com](http://looktohimandberadiant.com)



# Day 7:

## God Invites Our Questions

### 1. Center Down

Before we begin today's spiritual excursion, please take a few moments to breathe! Take three slow, deep breaths, expanding from your abdomen; try not to raise your shoulders. As you inhale, whisper, "***God invites us...***" As you exhale whisper, "***...to meet with Him***"

### 2. Slowly read aloud the following Scriptures

*(Feel free to pause at any time during your reading to reflect on, thank, praise, or acknowledge God's stirring in your thoughts and emotions.)*

[*And God said to Moses,*] "*Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.*" But Moses said to God, "**Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?**" He said, "*But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.*" Then Moses said to God, "**If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?**" God said to Moses, "*I am who I am.*" And he said, "*Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.'*" God also said to Moses, "*Say this to the people of Israel:*

*'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. (Exodus 3:10-15, ESV)*

*[The LORD said to Israel,] "Wash, cleanse yourselves, remove the evil of your deeds from before My eyes, cease to do evil. Learn to do good, seek justice, strengthen the robbed, perform justice for the orphan, plead the case of the widow. **Come now, let us debate, says the Lord.** If your sins prove to be like crimson, they will become white as snow; if they prove to be as red as crimson dye, they shall become as wool. If you be willing and obey, you shall eat the best of the land. But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword, for the mouth of the Lord spoke." (Isaiah 1:16-20, Judaica Press)*

### **For further exploration:**

Article: <http://bit.ly/GodQuestions1>

Video: <http://bit.ly/ChildrenQ>

### **3. Kingdom Prayer**

Eternal Father, we thank You for being in relationship with us and for being a listening Father. As a Church Family, we thank You for the opportunity that we have to join together today to pray. Thank You for drawing us into Your Holy family through the meritorious works of Jesus Christ. Thank You for creating us to be kings of The King and lords of The Lord. Thank

You, Father, for sending us the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us on this faith walk. The heavens proclaim Your glory and the skies display Your craftsmanship. Lord, we will praise You with our whole hearts. We will tell of all the marvelous things You have done. We will be filled with joy because of You. We will sing praises to Your Name, O Most High.

Righteous Father, as citizens of Your Kingdom, we are righteous people who live by faith. We will trust in You with all of our hearts and not depend on our own understanding. We will seek Your will in all that we do and in every situation, we will trust that You will show us which path to take. We will strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. We will run with endurance the race that You have set before us; keeping our eyes on Jesus, the Champion, who initiates and perfects our faith. Lord, we confess that we will continue to seek Your Kingdom above all else, live righteously, and trust that You will give us everything that we need. Father God, we know that You are not a man that You should lie, nor the son of man that You should repent. So we will stand on Your Word and put all of our faith and confidence in You. We declare, as Kingdom citizens, that we will trust You with our finances, families, jobs, businesses, relationships and every other area of our lives. We confess that our works will reflect the faith that we have in You, our Father.

Holy Spirit, please help us to relinquish control to You to lead our lives. Help us to transform the way we think by meditating on the Word, so that we will

fully embrace and walk in our Kingdom authority and rights. As ambassadors, help us make prayer a high priority in our lives, so that Your Kingdom is advanced. Give us the power to say no to the distractions that keep trying to steal our time with God. Remind us that nothing is a higher priority than the time we spend every day in prayer. Holy Spirit, please show us all those areas in our lives where our faith is faltering and reveal the tools that we need to increase our faith in those areas. Lord, there are some Church Family members who have had so many disappointments in life that they have a hard time walking by faith. Holy Spirit, please help them to get the help they need to process those disappointments and heal those internal wounds so that they can begin to walk in their Kingdom authority.

Compassionate Father, forgive us for having more faith in ourselves, our jobs, our finances, our gifts and talents and other people than we do in You. Forgive us for at times walking in unbelief. Forgive us for harboring dead faith. Holy Spirit, as a Church Family, remind us of those we need to forgive and help us to be quick to forgive.

Holy Spirit, help us all not to yield to temptation but deliver us from the evil one.

Triumphant Lord, all glory belongs to You, who alone are God. All glory, majesty, power and authority are Yours before all time and in the present and beyond all time! In Jesus' Name. Amen.

**Scripture References for the Written Text:** I Timothy 6:15, Psalm 19:1, Psalm 9:1-2, Hebrews 10:38, II Corinthians 5:7, Proverbs 3:5-6, Hebrews 12:1-2, Romans 12:2, Matthew 6:33, Numbers 23:19, James 2:18, James 2:17, Matthew 6:13, Jude 25

#### **4. Concepts to Consider**

There is difference between asking God questions and “questioning God.” The latter often implies a kind of fear-based perception of God. Too often our image of God is one of a heavy-handed Father who is waiting to “smite” us if we “talk back.” However, if we can work to replace this harsh image with one of God as Loving Father, then we can begin to realize that asking God questions is a natural part of our developing child-Parent relationship. God never rebuffs the sincere, heart-felt questions of His children. He is a good Father that longs to hear our hearts.

Remember, Scripture shows us several question-asking, earnest children of God, e.g., Moses, David (*Psalm 10:1*), Job (*Job 3:11*), Jeremiah (*Jeremiah 12:1*), and even Jesus (*Matthew 27:46*), just to name a few.

The passage from the Bible that we read above out of Isaiah is especially beautiful and opens up the heart of God to us. Even when God observes that His people are being impertinent and arrogant, He still leaves room for debate, argument, questions and repentance (*Isaiah 1:18*, וְנִכְחַתְּ *v'nee-VAHK-kha*], to “debate, argue, state your case.”). God’s firm but loving position here leaves room for us to verbalize what is swirling around in our heads and be assured that He will listen to us.

Now, He may not necessarily agree with what we've said, but He always leaves room for us and our position as persons created in His image. Additionally, in the Isaiah text we see that God encourages *teshuvah* [teh-SHOO-vah] ("repentance, turning"), but again, not in a harsh way; rather, in a matter-of-fact demonstration of God's "open to argument" character. When we connect with God through engaging Him--not ignoring or running away--God is always ready and waiting to engage with us.

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## **5. Reflection Questions**

*(You are encouraged to tangibly record your reflections based on the Biblical readings, Kingdom prayer, Concepts to consider, etc. Write, sing, create, etc)*

**a. Personal Reflection.** What are your honest questions for God?

**b. Kingdom Reflection.** As you observe the world around you, what are your honest questions for God, concerning the world and His Kingdom?

***Take time to write down and verbally  
express your honest questions to God.***

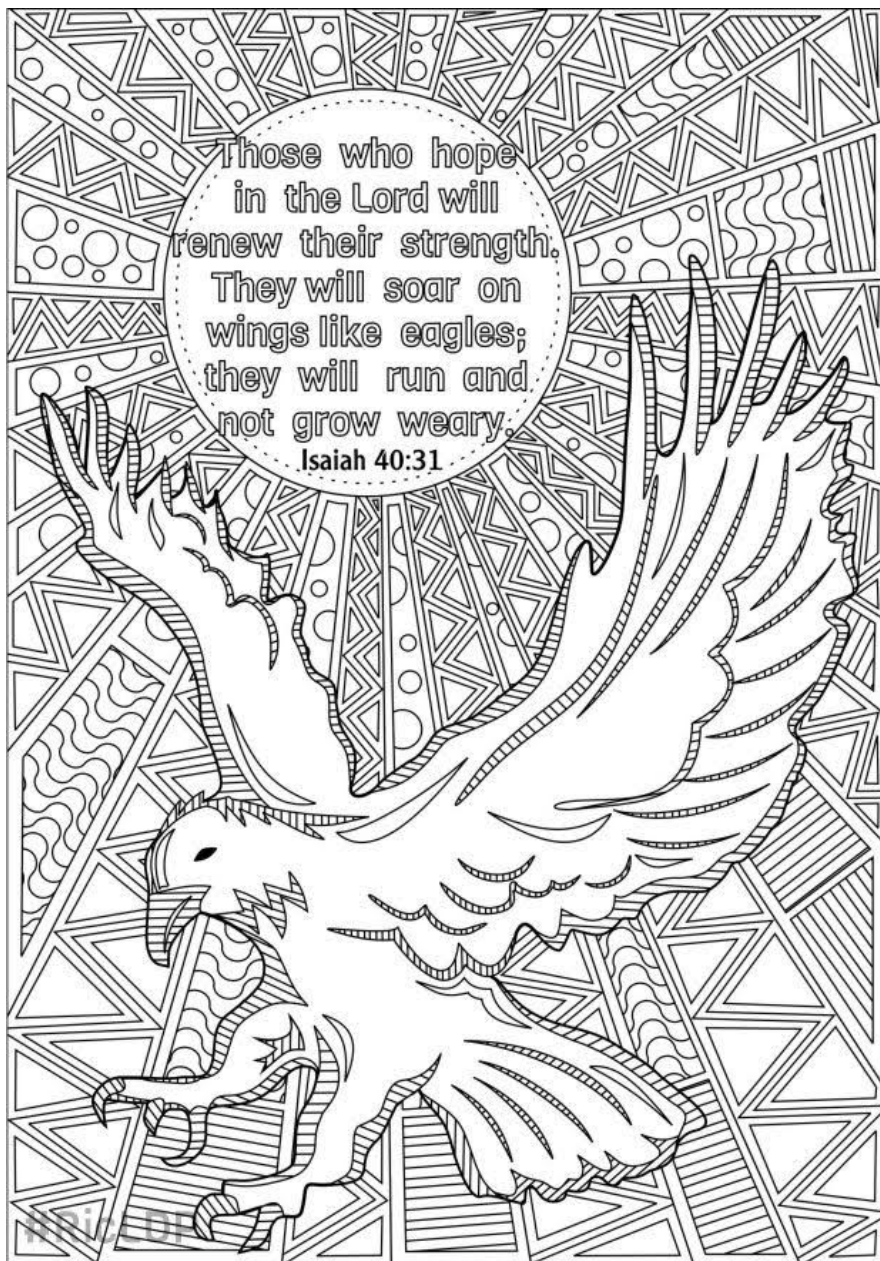
***Optional Time of Centering/Soaking:***

*If possible, take some time, perhaps 5 to 15 minutes, to get into a comfortable position and simply allow the Lord to minister to you at a deep level (Psalm 42:7). Turn off or put down all distractions. Close your eyes. Hold in your thoughts a meaningful word, phrase, or image from the Scripture passages you read today. Release all other thoughts and concerns into the Presence of the Lord. If your thoughts wander, that's okay, just gently return to your Scriptural word, phrase, or image. You may want to set a timer.*





Those who hope  
in the Lord will  
renew their strength.  
They will soar on  
wings like eagles;  
they will run and  
not grow weary.  
Isaiah 40:31



Notes:



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[www.kingdombuilders.com](http://www.kingdombuilders.com)   [www.facebook.com/incitewindsor](http://www.facebook.com/incitewindsor)

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**Kribyjon H. Caldwell, Senior Pastor**